

# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## WHITLOCK ADDRESSES AMERICAN LEGION MEMBERS

The 48th Annual South Dakota American Legion Mid-Winter Conference was held in Spearfish last weekend.

Saturday during the joint session presentations were made by State Commander Denny Brenden, Auxiliary President Jeanine Loesch, National Vice Commander James Sweet, SAL Detachment Commander Kerry Jorgenson, and SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock.

Secretary Whitlock provided the members with a legislative update and briefed them on the State Veterans Home, Operation Rally Point and the State Veteran's Cemetery. He closed his remarks by wishing the members a 100th Happy Birthday and thanked them for their youth programs, patriotism, support



of troops serving at home and abroad, assisting veterans in receiving benefits, and for conducting military funeral honors. Whitlock encouraged all to continue to work together to ensure our veterans experiences in obtaining services and benefits are seamless.

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# DAY COUNTY TO BE PURPLE HEART COUNTY

There are over 70 Purple Heart recipients in Day County and they will be honored at a ceremony on Tuesday, April 23, 2019, at 11:30 am. The ceremony will be held in the community room of the county courthouse.

During the ceremony, Day County will be proclaimed a "Purple Heart County."



# ACTING DIRECTOR NAMED FOR SIOUX FALLS VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Robert McDivitt, Network Director for the VA Midwest Health Care Network, has announced that, as of February 17, 2019, Ms. Barbara Teal will assume the role of Acting Medical Center Director for Sioux Falls.

Barbara Teal has served as the Associate Director, Patient Care Services/Nurse Executive for the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System since 2010. She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree with major in Nursing from South Dakota State University and a Master of Science in Health Professions – Health Care Administration from Texas State University (formerly known as Southwest Texas State University). She is certified as a Nurse Executive – Advanced (NEA-BC) through the American Nurses Credentialing Center.



Ms. Teal has 33 years of health care experience. Prior to coming to Sioux Falls in 2003, she was the Vice President for Quality Improvement and Director of Quality Management at St. David's Healthcare Partnership in Austin, TX. VA positions with collateral responsibilities include Administrator Clinical Resource Management, Administrative Officer for the Chief of Staff, Chief of Quality Resource Management, and Compliance and Business Integrity Officer. She is a graduate of the VA Executive Career Field Candidate Development Program and a member of the American Nurses Association & American Organization of Nurse Executives.

Please join SDDVA in welcoming Ms. Teal to her new assignment.

# VA ANNOUNCES MORTALITY DATA COLLABORATION WITH THE CDC

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the recent start of a new partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to improve public health surveillance data.

Specifically, the VA will support [CDC's Modernizing Death Reporting](#) project by integrating patient mortality data from the VA's Electronic Health Record (EHR) system.

A component of vital statistics, mortality data provides a critical view of the overall health of the nation. Moreover, mortality data identifies im-

portant variables for those dying in the U.S., assisting with the modeling of population life expectancy and cross-comparisons for health factors. The VA's collaboration with CDC's National Center for Health Statistics marks a shift in the way that mortality data has traditionally been provided, increasing the speed of data transmission and mitigating any loss of data value due to decreased interoperability.

The VA believes that open, Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR)-based Advanced Programming Interfaces (APIs) form an essential component of a modern interoperability strategy. To that end, the VA is committed to working collaboratively to expand available FHIR resources and their utilization. CDC has been hard at work to increase the speed, quality and interoperability of mortality data captured and reported, and this new collaboration with the VA further enables the advancement of this important work.

"Delivering data directly to CDC's systems in this manner underscores the VA's commitment to a modern interoperability strategy," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "We look forward to future opportunities to enhance our partnerships and champion interoperability across the federal government."

Using FHIR-based standards increases the value of this mortality data, as data is provided more quickly, enabling faster analysis and the delivery of more timely healthcare interventions.

For more information on the VA's partnership with CDC, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/modernization/index.htm>.

## Surveillance Strategy Report — Modernizing Mortality Reporting



# VETERANS TO ACCESS VA HEALTH DATA ON APPLE IPHONES

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will release new capabilities this summer providing veterans who receive care at the VA with the ability to access their personal medical data using the Health Records on iPhone feature from Apple.

Veterans will see an aggregated view of their allergies, conditions, immunizations, lab results, medications, procedures and vitals in the Health app on their iPhone. [Health Records on iPhone](#) also brings together hospitals and clinics outside VA with the existing Apple Health app. Veterans can see their available medical data from multiple providers, including the VA, whenever they choose.

This new capability has been made possible through the recently announced Veterans Health Application Programming Interface ([Veterans Health API](#)). This Veterans Health API allows veterans to access their health records within innovative applications on their mobile devices or in their web browser.

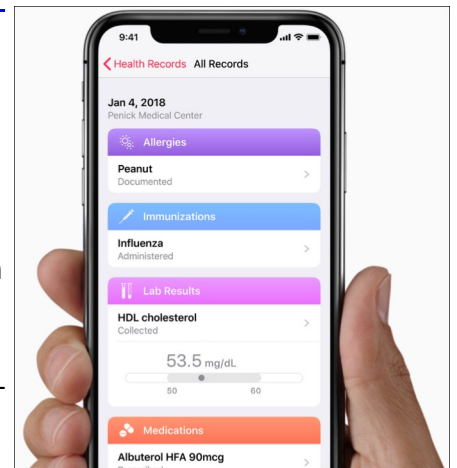
“Our Health API represents the next stage in the evolution of the VA’s patient data access capability,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “By building upon the Veterans Health API, we’re raising the bar in collaborating with private sector organizations to create and deploy innovative digital products for veterans. Veterans should be able to access their health data at any time, and I’m proud of how far we’ve come to accomplishing this.”

Launched in 2010, the [VA Blue Button](#), a feature of [My HealtheVet](#), opened the door for veterans to download a copy of their VA health records online. The new capability using VA’s Health API and Apple’s Health app furthers the VA’s commitment to make it easy for veterans to securely access their own health data.

Veterans with Apple iPhones will be able to access the app on their device. After a visit to a VA health care facility, the participating Veteran’s Apple device will automatically receive updated health record information within 24 hours from the visit using the built-in Health app from Apple on their iPhone. Beyond the effort on the Apple iPhone, the VA looks forward to partnering with others to bring similar capabilities to other mobile platforms.

[Lighthouse](#), considered the “front door” to the VA’s vast data stores, is the department’s API management platform. Since launching Lighthouse in March 2018, the VA has delivered a developer portal, a Benefits Intake API, a Facilities API and a Veterans Health API. The VA’s [Veterans Health API](#) is part of the VA’s commitment to health IT modernization, and will contribute to the VA’s expansive electronic health record modernization program.

For more information about the Veterans Health API, visit <https://developer.va.gov/explore/health>.





**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs



**Do you  
disagree with  
your VA decision?**

Now you have a choice.



VA Appeals Modernization provides you with more options to get a faster resolution of disagreements with VA decisions.

The simplified decision review process allows you to choose from one of three new review lanes to resolve your disagreement with your VA decision.



**The choice is yours.  
Learn More**

[www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/appeals.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/appeals.asp)



# SDNG HOSTS 35 ANNUAL DINING OUT

The South Dakota National Guard hosted its 2019 Dining-Out at the Ramkota Hotel and Convention Center in Pierre, Feb. 7.

The annual event brings together Guardsmen from across the state for a formal evening to honor the organization's history and to recognize individual and unit achievements from the past year.

The atmosphere, while formal, includes deep-rooted traditions which lighten the mood and provide both members and guests not only plenty of laughs, but a chance to learn some of the organization's history, traditions and an opportunity to recognize individual and unit achievements.

A video highlighting the many accomplishments made by the men and women of the SDNG in 2018 was shown, in addition to comments from Gov. Kristi Noem and Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, the SDNG adjutant general. The National Guard also recognized a family, an employer and a public servant with awards recognizing their contributions to the SDNG mission.

The awards portion of the evening began by presenting Sanford Health with the South Dakota Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Pro Patria Award.

The Pro Patria Award is presented annually to one South Dakota employer who provides exceptional support to national defense through leadership practices and personnel policies that support employees serving in the National Guard or Reserve.

Master Sgt. Nathan Peterson, chief of staff and vice president of strategic planning for Sanford Health and a member of the South Dakota Air National Guard's 114th Fighter Wing, nominated his employer for the award.

"Sanford Health, with its nearly 50,000 employees in 26 states, understands that our nation's employers are inextricably linked to our nation's defense by sharing their most precious assets, their employees," said Capt. Chad Carlson, executive director for the SD ESGR committee.

As a result, they established the Sanford Department of Veteran and Military Services, which takes the lead on actively recruiting, employing and retaining service members and veterans.

"I have served in the Air National Guard for the entirety of my eight years at Sanford Health. During that time, my employer has always made any necessary accommodations for me to complete my military obligations, including routine training, periodic schools and short-notice activations," Master Sgt. Peterson said. "I've had other employers that supported my military service, but none have done more to support me and my family than Sanford Health."



Pictured l to r is: Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, SDNG adjutant general; Gov. Kristi Noem; Paul Weckman, Sanford Health ; and Jim White, ESGR-SD chair.

(Continued)

# DINING OUT (CONTINUED)

Sanford Health's leave policy provides its deployed employees with differential pay for up to one year if military pay is less than their salary at Sanford. Service members are also provided the option of continuing healthcare, dental and life insurance benefits for up to one year while deployed, mobilized or serving on state or national emergencies.

Peterson is not alone in recognizing the support Sanford provides. Other service member employees have nominated Sanford Health for 70 Patriot Awards, the Above and Beyond Award and the 7 Seals Award. They were also a Department of Defense semi-finalist for the Freedom Award and received the North Dakota Pro Patria Award.

"Employers are inextricably linked to the nation's defense by sharing their most precious assets, their employees," Carlson added. "Sanford Health is deserving of this recognition for their outstanding contributions to our military services. Their leadership exemplifies the patriotic spirit that is alive and well here in our great State of South Dakota."

The SDNG next awarded the 2019 Williamson Militiaman Award to Sen. John Thune.

The Williamson Militiaman Award, established in 1987 by Maj. Gen. Ronald F. Williamson, recognizes an individual who exemplifies the spirit of the citizen-Soldier or Airman as shown by their community leadership, their support of the National Guard and the defense of the country.

"Sen. John Thune has been an ardent supporter of the National Guard throughout his days as a congressman in the U.S. House of Representatives and as a United States Senator," said Maj. Gen. Reisch. "He is a perennial supporter and advocate for the U.S. Armed Forces, the National Guard and for the veterans of South Dakota."

Thune served on the Senate Armed Services Committee and was a ranking member on the Readiness and Management Subcommittee, which oversaw military readiness including military construction, training, logistics, maintenance and installations.

Throughout his political career, Thune has fought for the modernization of equipment and facilities required to ensure the success of the National Guard responding to emergencies here at home, as well as serving in combat missions abroad.

"Sen. Thune supported the elevation of the Chief of the National Guard to a four-star position and inclusion as a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff," Reisch added. "This is considered one of the most significant steps forward for the National Guard in our history."

Thune has also committed countless hours of his time demonstrating his personal support time and time again, attending nearly every deployment or welcome home ceremony for South Dakota Army and Air National Guard units since 9/11.



Pictured l to r is: Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, SDNG adjutant general; Sen. John Thune; and Maj. Gen. Ronald Williamson.

(continued)



# DINING OUT (CONTINUED)

When members of the 114th Fighter Wing returned home from a deployment to South Korea, Thune made it a point to be there to personally welcome the Airmen home as they disembarked the plane.

Thune continues to demonstrate his support for veterans and has been a tireless advocate to sustain operations at the Hot Springs Veterans Home. He is a strong proponent for the Veterans History Project, where he was able to interview his father, Harold Thune, who served in World War II as a fighter pilot.

While Sen. Thune was not able to accept the award in person during the Dining-Out, he pre-recorded a message for the soldiers and airmen in attendance. "I am deeply honored and grateful to receive this award," Thune said. "I couldn't be more honored to represent the men and women of the South Dakota National Guard who represent our state with your continual skill, professionalism, courage and work ethic, which you display on a daily basis. We are enormously grateful for your service and sacrifice, and for that of your families."

To conclude the awards portion of the evening, The Adjutant General's Family Award was presented to Kayla and Tech. Sgt. Zane Nightingale with the 114th Fighter Wing. The award recognizes family members who support their service members in a truly exemplary manner while managing family, careers, or even hardship, all the while not seeking recognition for their sacrifices.

This past year, Kayla dedicated over 125 hours attending meetings and making phone calls to family members of deployed Airmen, which included her husband Zane. She was on the phone almost daily with Airmen and family members and pulled in new volunteers, building the Family Volunteer Group.

"Kayla even arranged the first 'coffee and conversation' event, where families could visit with each other, leadership and with an airman who returned from deployment to begin the transition process," said Quenten Johnson. "Her work with leadership is second to none."

"Kayla is the 'go-to' for wing families when there is a hardship or need of support," Johnson said. "She has become a great role model for our other key volunteers helping guide their path during challenging times."

Kayla also engaged directly with the Family Volunteer Group, the Airman and Family Programs office, and with the wing during the Yellow Ribbon programs, military send offs, family day events, and the SDNG Family & Youth Symposium.

"The Nightingale family is the pillar of excellence when it comes to the 114th Fighter Wing and to the South Dakota National Guard," said Johnson. "We are proud to honor their dedication and unwavering support for service members and their families."



Pictured l to r is: Gov. Kristi Noem; Zane Nightingale; and Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, SDNG adjutant general.



# BHSU MILITARY/VETERANS APPRECIATION NIGHT

Attention active duty military members and veterans— Black Hills State University is hosting a “Military and Veterans Appreciation Night on Friday, March 1st.

BHSU Basketball vs South Dakota School of Mines and Technology at the Young Center. Women's game starts at 5:30 pm and men's at 7:30 pm (MT).

All active military and veterans will receive two free tickets with ID.

This is BHSU's opportunity to say thanks to active duty military personnel and veterans.



**MARCH 1<sup>ST</sup>**

**MILITARY APPRECIATION NIGHT**

All Military/Veterans will receive 2 free tickets with ID

BHSU Basketball @ The Young Center  
vs. South Dakota School of Mines & Technology

Black Hills State University

Women @ 5:30pm | Men @ 7:30pm

## MY HEALTHEVET

Please note that the VA has changed most of their “My HealtheVet” promo materials.

If you have any My HealtheVet pamphlets, brochures, or other materials from SFVAHCS please contact Barbie Steele at [barbara.steele2@va.gov](mailto:barbara.steele2@va.gov) or 605-336-3230 x6440 to get copies of the most updated resources.

For Black Hills VAHCS please contact Charles Henderson at [Charles.henderson6@va.gov](mailto:Charles.henderson6@va.gov) or 605-745-2000 x2356.



# VA SEEKS TRAINING PROVIDERS TO READY VETERANS FOR HIGH-TECH CAREERS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it is inviting training providers to participate in a new pilot program to prepare veterans for careers in the high-tech workforce.

The [Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses](#) (VET TEC) program, for which veterans can apply beginning in April, is designed to give veterans more options and access to nontraditional training to acquire skills in information technology, computer software, information science, media application, data processing and computer programming fields.

“We are invested in ensuring veterans make successful transitions into their post-military career,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “We are excited to partner with successful training providers who will help pave the way for veterans seeking meaningful employment in their field of study.”

VET TEC training providers will have access to student veterans who are motivated, hard-working team players. They will operate under an incentivized payment structure designed to ensure veterans complete their training and land good jobs. The structure includes the following:

- When veterans begin their courses, the VA will pay the training provider 25 percent of tuition and mandatory fees.
- When a veteran graduates, the VA will pay another 25 percent of the tuition and mandatory fees.
- When a veteran lands a job in his or her area of study and training, the VA will pay the last 50 percent of tuition and mandatory fees.

Veterans will receive a monthly housing stipend while in training. This benefit will be modeled after the [Post-9/11 GI Bill housing rate](#).

The [VET TEC webpage](#) provides additional requirements and application instructions. The VA will review applications from training providers to ensure proposed programs meet VET TEC criteria. Selected training providers will be notified in early spring.

VET TEC is part of the [Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017](#), commonly referred to as the [Forever GI Bill](#). The Forever GI Bill was signed into law Aug. 16, 2017, and further expands GI Bill benefits.

For more information on VA education benefits, visit <https://benefits.va.gov/gibill/>.



# VET TEC'S 3-5-7 FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

3

## REASONS You Should Choose VET TEC – LEARN, TURN, and EARN!

- **Learn** the high tech skills that top employers demand
- **Turn** VET TEC's coding boot camps into an opportunity to gain 21<sup>st</sup> century skills
- **Earn** a better living for yourself and your family

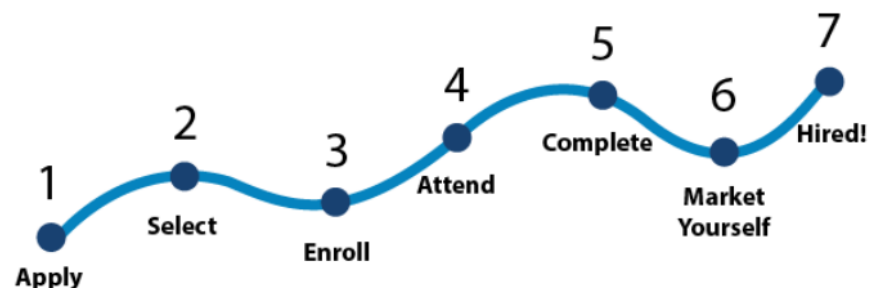
5

## HIGH DEMAND Training Areas



7

## STEP ROADMAP to Securing Your Future



Here are just a few of the immediate benefits:

- training paid by VA
- monthly housing for students during training
- only one day of GI Bill entitlement needed and program doesn't use benefits.

# **VABHHCS RECOGNIZED FOR EXCELLENCE**

The VA Veteran Experience Office (VEO) recognized VA medical centers leading the way in patient experience and employee engagement at the VA Patient Experience Symposium held February 5-7 in Crystal City, Virginia.

Based on the Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (SHEP) scores and All Employee Survey (AES) results from fiscal year 2018, twelve VA facilities in three categories of facility complexity level were nominated to receive Patient Experience awards.

Five of the twelve nominees recognized were VA Midwest Healthcare network facilities: Sioux Falls, Central Iowa, Fargo, Hot Springs, and Minneapolis.

Each of the twelve nominees were invited to submit a narrative describing the incorporation of the VA Patient Experience (VA PX) framework into their approach to providing exceptional patient experiences. The entries were anonymously reviewed and rated by a panel of VA PX coaches, other VEO leaders, as well as leaders from Veterans Health Administration (VHA) SHEP team.

“Providing an exceptional experience is one of our highest priorities. It is an honor to be recognized as a top ranked performer in VHA,” said Sandra Horsman, Director VA Black Hills Health Care System (BHHCS). “We strive to be an organization where veterans are truly at the center of their care, taking charge of their health and feeling supported by their health care teams. No matter where a veteran receives his/her health care at VABHHCS, he/she can expect the same level of caring, compassionate service.”

# **SFVAHCS RECOGNIZED FOR EXCELLENCE**

The U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Sioux Falls Health Care System was recognized for leading the way in patient experience and employee engagement at the VA Patient Experience Symposium February 5-7 in Crystal City, Virginia.

Based on Survey of Healthcare Experiences of Patients (“SHEP) scores and All Employee Survey (AES) results from Fiscal Year 2018, Sioux Falls was announced the top performer in the facility complexity level 2 category for overall patient experience. The overall winner across all complexity levels was Asheville, North Carolina. Iron Mountain, Michigan received the level 3 category award; and Cleveland, Ohio placed first in the level 1 category. Other facilities nominated were Alaska, Boston, Connecticut, and Madison, Wisconsin.

Four other VA Midwest Healthcare Network facilities were also nominated: Central Iowa in Des Moines, IA, Fargo, ND, Hot Springs, SD and Minneapolis, MN.

“We’re proud to receive this award that demonstrates our staff’s commitment to providing Veterans and their families excellence in care and pledge our continued efforts for quality service,” noted Barbara Teal, Acting Director.



# VA'S RAMP TO END AHEAD OF IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW VETERAN APPEALS LAW

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it will discontinue the [Rapid Appeals Modernization Program \(RAMP\)](#), which provided eligible veterans with early resolutions to their appealed claims, ahead of full implementation of the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 that takes effect Feb. 19, 2019.

The VA will not accept RAMP elections from veterans with a legacy appeal after Feb. 15, 2019; however, RAMP claims pending on or after Feb. 15 will continue to be processed until the inventory is complete. Beginning Feb. 19, veterans who appeal a VA decision will have three decision review choices: Higher-Level Review, Supplemental Claim, and appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals. The VA will now offer veterans greater choice in how the VA reviews their claim is committed to ensuring the claims process is accurate, timely and fair.

"The VA has been preparing for full implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act over the past 18 months to ensure the new, streamlined process is available to veterans who have long sought reform of the broken legacy system," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "We encourage veterans whose appeal is currently in the legacy system to [opt in](#) to RAMP before February 15 to take full advantage of the benefits of the new process."

The VA initiated RAMP in November 2017 to provide some of the benefits of the new law's streamlined process before full implementation. Participation in RAMP is voluntary. However, processing times under the program have been faster than legacy appeal processing times. Under the legacy process, decisions currently average three to seven years. Veterans who have a legacy appeal after Feb. 15 will be able to opt in to the process when they receive a Statement of the Case or a Supplemental Statement of the Case after the new law is effective Feb. 19.

Veterans who participate in RAMP can choose to have their VA decision reviewed in either the Supplemental Claim or Higher-Level Review lanes. In the Higher-Level Review lanes, a more experienced adjudicator will conduct a new look at the previous decision based on the evidence considered in the previous decision. Participants who select the Supplemental Claim option may submit new and relevant evidence, and the VA will assist in developing new evidence under its duty to assist. The VA's goal is to complete Supplemental Claims and Higher-Level Reviews in an average of 125 days.

For more information on Appeals Modernization, visit <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/appeals.asp> and <https://www.bva.va.gov/>.

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Feb 18—State Offices Closed—President's Day

Feb 21—Drop In Legal Services—American Legion Post 17 (1412 9th Ave SW—Watertown (9:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)

Feb 22—Drop in Legal Services—DAV (1519 W. 51st Street)—Sioux Falls (9:00 am—3:00 pm) (CT)

Feb 26—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Hot Springs Building 12—Room A002—10:00 am—12:00 pm (MT)

Mar 3—NSIC/Sanford Basketball Championship Military Appreciation Day—Sanford Pentagon—Sioux Falls

Mar 3-7—VFW Legislative Conference—Washington, DC

Mar 6—VABHHCS Art Show—Building 145—Classroom 108—Ft. Meade—1:00 to 4:00 pm (MT)

Mar 8—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273 (420 Main Street—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)

Mar 12—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Ft Meade—Building 145—Room 239—1:00 pm—3:00 pm (MT)

Mar 13—VABHHCS Art Show—Hot Springs Domiciliary Auditorium—1:00 to 4:00 pm (MT)

Mar 20—South Dakota Veterans Council meeting—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)

Mar 26—VABHHCS Whole Health Program—Hot Springs Building 12—Room A002—10:00 am—12:00 pm (MT)

Apr 6—State MOPH Convention—Rapid City DAV (101 E. Madison Street) - 1:00 pm (MT)

May 7—SDDVA Mini Conference—TREA (1981 Centre Street)—Rapid City—10:00 am—3:00 pm (MT)

May 8—SDDVA Mini Conference—Post 8 American Legion (520 S. Pierre Street)—Pierre—10:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)

May 9—SDDVA Mini Conference—VFW (3601 S. Minnesota Avenue)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am—3:00 pm (CT)

May 14—Bill Casper's Annual WW II Luncheon—TREA—Rapid City

May 17—Veterans Honor Concert—State Veterans Home—Hot Springs—2:00 pm (MT)

May 17-19—DAV Convention—Hilton Garden Inn (5300 S. Grand Circle) —Sioux Falls

May 27—MJFSVH Memorial Day Car Show—Hot Springs—2:00 pm (MT)

July 20-24—National VFW Convention—Orlando, FL

Aug 26-29—SDDVA Benefit School



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South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>

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